
BLACK RIVER STATE FOREST

DRAFT MASTER PLAN

JANUARY 2010



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This plan has been developed through a team effort by many individuals from the Department of Natural Resources. Through their hard work and expertise, these people have developed a plan that will guide the Black River State Forest into the future.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction and Plan Overview	1
Purpose of the Master Plan.....	1
Overview of the Planning Process	1
Plan Content and Organization	2
Need to Revise the Black River State Forest Master Plan	2
Overview of the Draft Plan.....	2
How the Statutory and Other Purposes and Benefits of the State Forest Will be Realized Through the Draft Plan.....	5
Management and Development	9
Vision Statement.....	9
Property Goals.....	9
General Management Strategy for the State Forest.....	9
Land Management Areas	10
Forest Production Management Areas	12
Area 1: Perry Creek Basin	14
Area 2: Morrison and Levis Creek Basin	18
Area 3: Robinson Creek Basin.....	22
Habitat Management Areas	26
Area 4: Jack Pine Area	28
Area 5: Dike 17 Wildlife Habitat Management Area.....	32
Native Community Management Areas	36
Area 6: Upper Black River	38
Area 7: Arbutus Oaks	42
Area 8: Castle Mound Pine Forest	46
Area 9: East Fork of the Black River.....	50
Area 10: Ketchum Creek Headwaters.....	54
Area 11: Paradise Valley Pines	58
Area 12: Peatlands	62
Area 13: Catfish Eddy Terraces	66
Area 14: Robinson/Millston Pines	70
Area 15: Settlement Road Pine Swamp.....	74
Area 16: Stanton Pines.....	78
Area 17: Starlight Wetlands.....	82
Recreation Management Areas.....	86
Area 18: Overmeyer Hills	88
Area 19: Campgrounds and Day Use Areas	92

Proposed State Natural Areas	96
General Forest Management Prescriptions by Primary Forest Type	98
Jack Pine Dominated Forest	98
White Pine Dominated Forest	98
Red Pine Dominated Forest	98
Oak Dominated Mixed Forest	99
Aspen Dominated Mixed Forest	99
Forested Wetlands	99
Bottomland Hardwood Forest	100
Marshes and Open Wetlands	100
Wildlife Management Plan	101
Wildlife Habitat Management	101
Endangered, Threatened, and Species of Special Concern	103
Integrated Management	103
Wildlife Population Monitoring	103
Wildlife Population Management	103
Wildlife Research	103
Financial and Workforce Constraints	103
Fisheries Management Plan	104
Warm Water Streams	104
Warm Water Lakes	104
Cold Water Streams	105
General Habitat Maintenance and Improvement	105
Management Priorities	105
Fishing Regulations	105
Invasive Species	105
Research Activities	105
Recreation Management Plan	106
Background	106
Recreation Management Objectives	106
Camping	106
Day Use and Picnic Areas	108
Designated Non-Motorized Trails	109
Motorized Trails	110
State Trails Network	113
Fishing	113
Hunting and Trapping	113
Education and Interpretation	113
Recreation Land Use Agreements	113
Aesthetic Management on Lake and Stream Shorelines	113

Real Estate Management.....	114
Forest Boundary Expansion	114
Real Estate Acquisition Policies	114
Aides in Lieu of Taxes	115
Future Boundary Adjustment Process	115
Easements, Access Permits, and Land Use Agreements	115
Road Management	115
Road Classification and General Road Management	115
Access Policy for Public Vehicles	116
Aesthetic Management for Roadway Corridors.....	116
Non-Metallic Mining Policy	116
Important Geologic Features	116
General Administration and Management Policies and Provisions	117
Forest Reconnaissance	117
Best Management Practices for Water Quality	117
Forest Pest Control	117
Invasive Species Control	117
Chemical Use	117
Endangered, Threatened and Species of Special Concern Protection.....	118
Funding Constraints	118
Disabled Accessibility.....	118
Facility Management.....	118
Public Health and Safety	118
Emergency Action Plan.....	118
Authorized Response to Catastrophic Events.....	118
Fire Suppression	119
Refuse Management	119
Correction Crew Activities	119
Military Activities	119
Research	119
Property Wide Management of Dams and Flowages	119
Forest Certification.....	119
Public Communications Plan.....	120
Tribal Consultation.....	120
Contact Person.....	120

Background and Affected Environment	123
Property Description.....	123
Property Overview	123
Past Management and Use.....	123
Physical Environment	123
Water Resources and Aquatic Habitats	126
Upland and Lowland Vegetation and Natural Communities or Habitats.....	130
Wildlife Resources	133
Recreational Facilities and Use	135
Social and Cultural Resources.....	137
Regional Context.....	138
Land Ownership and Land-Use Patterns	138
Biological Resources and Ecological Need.....	138
Recreational Resources and Use	139
Cultural Resources	140
Socio-economic Trends	140
Property Capabilities, Limitations, and Opportunities	141
Ecological Significance and Capability of the Black River State Forest	142
Recreational Significance and Capability of the Black River State Forest	143
Summary.....	143
Appendices.....	145
Appendix A. Black River State Forest Master Plan Designation Process for State Natural Areas	145
Appendix B. Endangered or Threatened Species and Species of Special Concern	148
Appendix C. Wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need.....	152
Appendix D. Glossary of Terms.....	161
Appendix E. References.....	163

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Land Management Areas.....	11
Table 2.2 Forest Production Management Areas	12
Table 2.3 Perry Creek Basin Current and Predicted Land Cover	16
Table 2.4 Morrison and Lewis Creek Basin Current and Predicted Land Cover	20
Table 2.5 Robinson Creek Basin Current and Predicted Land Cover.....	24
Table 2.6 Habitat Management Areas	26
Table 2.7 Jack Pine Area Current and Predicted Land Cover	30
Table 2.8 Dike 17 Current and Predicted Land Cover.....	34
Table 2.9 Native Community Management Areas.....	36

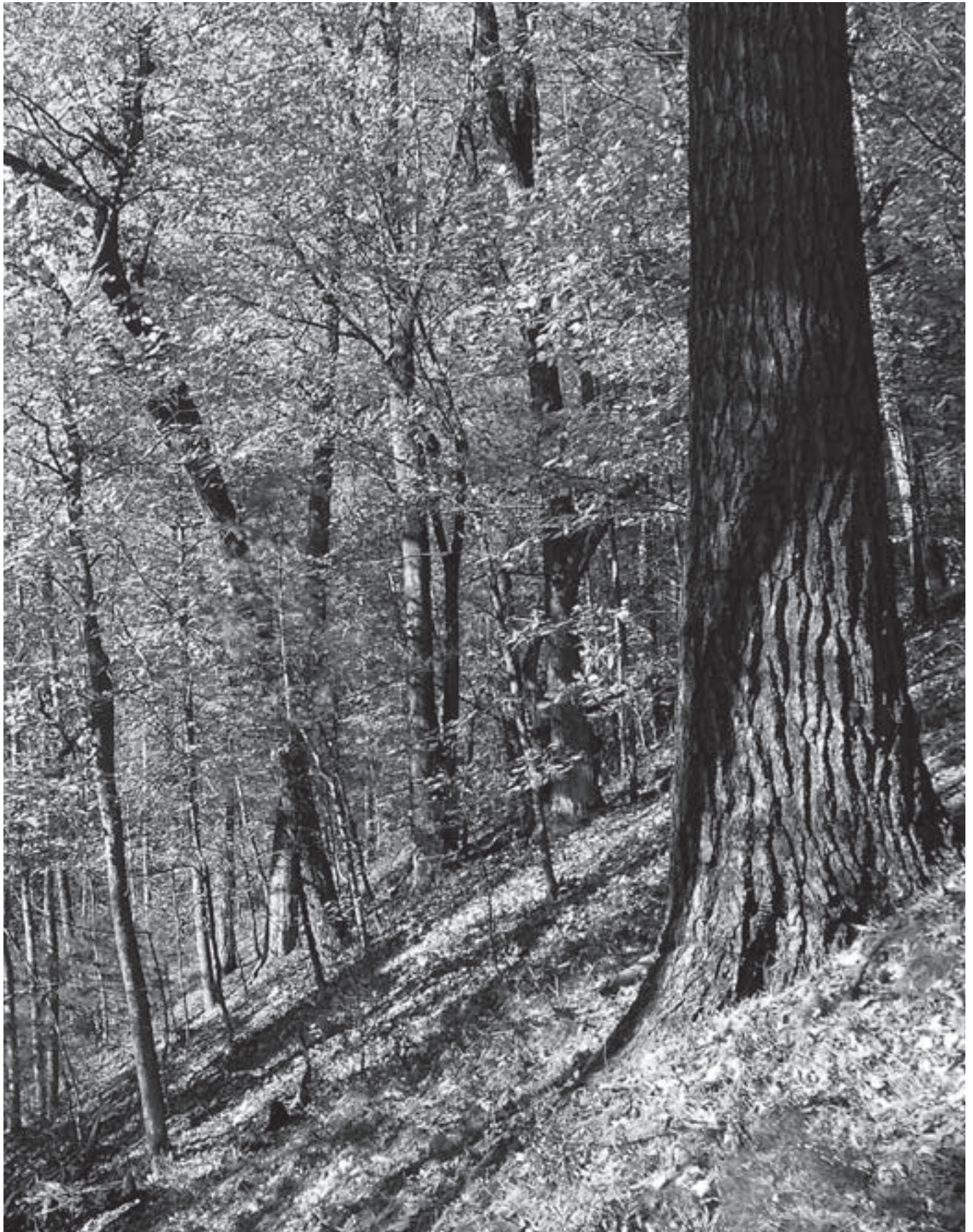
Table 2.10 Upper Black River Current and Predicted Land Cover	40
Table 2.11 Arbutus Oaks Current and Predicted Land Cover	44
Table 2.12 Castle Mound Pine Forest Current and Predicted Land Cover	48
Table 2.13 East Fork of the Black River Current and Predicted Land Cover	52
Table 2.14 Ketchum Creek Headwaters Current and Predicted Land Cover	56
Table 2.15 Paradise Valley Pines Current and Predicted Land Cover	60
Table 2.16 Peatlands Current and Predicted Land Cover	64
Table 2.17 Catfish Eddy Terraces Current and Predicted Land Cover	68
Table 2.18 Robinson/Millston Pines Current and Predicted Land Cover	72
Table 2.19 Settlement Road Pine Swamp Current and Predicted Land Cover	76
Table 2.20 Stanton Pines Current and Predicted Land Cover	80
Table 2.21 Starlight Wetlands Current and Predicted Land Cover	84
Table 2.22 Recreation Management Areas	86
Table 2.23 Overmeyer Hills Current and Predicted Land Cover	90
Table 2.24 Campgrounds and Day Use Areas	92
Table 2.25 Proposed State Natural Areas	96
Table 2.26 Current and Planned Number of Campsites	106
Table 2.27 Boat and Canoe Landings on the Black River State Forest	108
Table 2.28 Current and Planned Non-Motorized Designated Trails	109
Table 2.29 Current and Planned Motorized Recreational Trails	111
Table 3.1 Impoundments Located within the Black River State Forest	125
Table 3.2 Fish Species in the East Fork of the Black River	126
Table 3.3 Dams in the Black River State Forest	129
Table 3.4 Black River State Forest Timber Sale Statistics, 2003 - 2007	131
Table 3.5 Plants with Their Largest State Populations in the Region	133
Table 3.6 Wisconsin Endangered or Threatened Animals Found in the Black River Region	134
Table 3.7 Federal Endangered or Threatened Animals in the Black River Region	135
Table 3.8 Black River State Forest Approximate Campground Visitors in 2005 and Five Year Averages	137
Table 3.9 Percent Occupancy of Family Campgrounds in the Black River State Forest (June-August)	137
Table 3.10 Percent Forest Cover and Total Acres by Stand Age in the Region from 1983-2004	138
Table 3.11 Acres Available for Hunting in Jackson County	139
Table 3.12 Top 10 Employers in Jackson County in 2004	141
Table 3.13 Tourism Impact, Visitor, Employment and Income Impact in 2004	141

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Land Cover Types of the Black River State Forest	10
Figure 2.2 Perry Creek Basin Current Land Cover.....	16
Figure 2.3 Morrison and Levis Creek Basin Current Land Cover	20
Figure 2.4 Robinson Creek Basin Current Land Cover	24
Figure 2.5 Jack Pine Basin Current Land Cover	30
Figure 2.6 Dike 17 Current Land Cover	34
Figure 2.7 Upper Black River Current Land Cover.....	40
Figure 2.8 Arbutus Oaks Current Land Cover	44
Figure 2.9 Castle Mound Pine Forest Current Land Cover.....	48
Figure 2.10 East Fork of the Black River Current Land Cover	52
Figure 2.11 Ketchum Creek Headwaters Current Land Cover	56
Figure 2.12 Paradise Valley Pines Current Land Cover.....	60
Figure 2.13 Peatlands Current Land Cover.....	64
Figure 2.14 Catfish Eddy Terraces Current Land Cover.....	68
Figure 2.15 Robinson/Millston Pines Current Land Cover.....	72
Figure 2.16 Settlement Road Pine Swamp Current Land Cover	76
Figure 2.17 Stanton Pines Current Land Cover	80
Figure 2.18 Starlight Wetlands Current Land Cover.....	84
Figure 2.19 Overmeyer Hills Current Land Cover	90
Figure 3.1 Current Cover Types in the Black River State Forest	131

LIST OF MAPS

Map 2.1 Current Land Cover	APPENDIX
Map 2.2 Land Management Classifications	APPENDIX
Map 2.3 Forest Production Management Areas	13
Map 2.4 Perry Creek Basin.....	15
Map 2.5 Morrison and Levis Creek Basin	19
Map 2.6 Robinson Creek Basin	23
Map 2.7 Habitat Management Areas	27
Map 2.8 Jack Pine Area.....	29
Map 2.9 Dike 17 Wildlife Habitat Management Area	33
Map 2.10 Native Community Management Areas	37
Map 2.11 Upper Black River	39
Map 2.12 Arbutus Oaks	43
Map 2.13 Castle Mound Pine Forest.....	47
Map 2.14 East Fork of the Black River	51
Map 2.15 Ketchum Creek Headwaters	55
Map 2.16 Paradise Valley Pines.....	59
Map 2.17 Peatlands.....	63
Map 2.18 Catfish Eddy Terraces	67
Map 2.19 Robinson/Millston Pines.....	71
Map 2.20 Settlement Road Pine Swamp	75
Map 2.21 Stanton Pines	79
Map 2.22 Starlight Wetlands	83
Map 2.23 Recreation Management Areas	87
Map 2.24 Overmeyer Hills	89
Map 2.25 Campgrounds And Day Use Areas.....	93
Map 2.26 Proposed State Natural Areas	97
Map 2.27 Current and Planned Recreation Facilities.....	APPENDIX
Map 2.28 Implementation of Planned Recreation Facilities	APPENDIX
Map 2.29 Planned Boundary Expansion.....	APPENDIX





INTRODUCTION AND PLAN OVERVIEW

The Black River State Forest, comprised of over 68,000 acres in Jackson and Clark Counties, protects a wide variety of forest resources and important habitat areas. Forest management areas provide a large land base for sustainable timber production, while several native community management areas and State Natural Areas on the site protect important ecological communities and species.

Forest communities on the Black River State Forest are diverse and include common Wisconsin oak and pine communities, as well as a number of rare and unique forest communities such as white pine-red maple swamps, pine and oak barrens, central poor fen, tamarack-black spruce swamp, and moist cliff. The property provides raw materials for Wisconsin's forestry industry, offers a model for sustainable forest management, and protects unique ecological communities and habitat for wildlife.

All management on the Black River State Forest is implemented using principles of sustainable forestry. The Black River State Forest harvests between 700 to 1,600 acres annually yielding, on average, approximately 15,000 cord equivalents. Forest management on the state forest is intended to provide economic, ecological, and social benefits to present and future generations.

Ecologically, the Black River State Forest supports a wide range of plant and animal species, some of which are rare, endangered, or threatened. As of 2006, the Natural Heritage Inventory documented 48 rare plant species and 119 rare animal species within a study area that encompasses the Black River State Forest and the surrounding Meadow Valley landscape. Of the 119 rare animal species, at least 25% of their known statewide occurrence is within this study area.

The Black River corridor, its tributaries, and an extensive dike and dam network on the property support a diverse range of common and rare species, and offer recreational opportunities.

Recreation on the property is diverse and supports a wide range of uses. The Black River, East Fork of the Black River, and various flowages on the property offer opportunities for fishing and canoeing. Recreational trails provide space for ATV riding, snowmobiling, bicycling, cross-country skiing,

hiking, and horseback riding. Motorized trails on the property connect to a large system of regional trails, providing visitors with numerous recreational opportunities. Over 100 campsites on the property welcome visitors. Hunting is one of the most popular activities on the state forest, with seasons open for whitetail deer, turkey, grouse, bear and small game. The Black River State Forest and the Jackson County Forest are two of the largest tracts of open hunting land in the southern half of the state and attract a large number of hunters annually.

PURPOSE OF THE MASTER PLAN

The Black River State Forest Master Plan spells out how the property will be managed, used and developed, and the benefits it will provide. It defines the forest management practices, recreational uses, other land management activities, and additional aspects of the property's future use and development.

The Black River State Forest Master Plan:

- Provides a vision and framework for the use, development, management and acquisition of the forest well into the future with an emphasis on the next 15 years.
- Identifies land management areas and plans for their future management.
- Describes general and specific management objectives and prescriptions for each management area.
- Makes recommendations for forest production, recreation, and habitat conservation to meet current and future needs.
- Provides for continuing public involvement during plan implementation.

OVERVIEW OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

There are several major phases in the master planning process as well as opportunity for public input and participation. These phases include completing the Regional and Property Analysis, establishing the property vision and goals, considering management alternatives, and finally creating a plan and an environmental analysis.

The Department of Natural Resources worked actively with local towns, tribes, non-governmental organizations, citizens, and businesses to create the Black River State Forest Master Plan. The planning process is guided by State Statute 28.04 and Wisconsin Administrative code NR 44.

The development of the Black River State Forest Master Plan has also been guided by a commitment to sustainable forestry. Forest practices have addressed aspects of sustainability for decades, but “sustainable forestry” is a relatively new concept. While individual definitions may vary slightly, there is general agreement that sustainable forestry focuses on meeting the environmental, economic, recreational and social needs of current generations while protecting the forest’s ability to fill the same role for future generations. Additionally, the previous property plan and extensive ecological, economic, and social assessments provided a data foundation for the development of this plan.

Public involvement has been an integral part of the planning process, beginning with public open house meetings and surveys to identify important planning issues and views on the forest’s future direction. That involvement continued through the other steps in the process, developing a vision statement and property goals, evaluating management alternatives, and developing the Preferred Alternative and Options. This planning process culminates with the public review of the draft Master Plan and Environmental Analysis followed by plan review and approval by the Natural Resources Board.

PLAN CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

The master plan is presented in three chapters:

- Chapter One

Overview of the forest, the purpose of the master plan, and a planning process overview.
- Chapter Two

Use and development of the property.
- Chapter Three

Background information on the region and the property.

NEED TO REVISE THE BLACK RIVER STATE FOREST MASTER PLAN

The last master plan for the Black River State Forest was approved in 1983. The Department determined the need to revise the plan in light of changing ecological, economic, and social conditions, to incorporate new information learned since that time and to consider management in context of the larger landscape in which the forest is located as required by Wisconsin State Statute 28.04. This plan will receive a formal, rigorous review approximately every 15 years. When necessary, the plan may also be updated by plan amendments and variances through a formal process that includes public involvement.

OVERVIEW OF THE DRAFT PLAN

Land Management Areas

The Black River State Forest has been divided into 19 Land Management Areas: three Forest Production Management Areas, two Habitat Management Areas, 12 Native Community Management Areas, and two Recreation Management Areas. Within the designated Land Management Areas, there are 10 State Natural Areas; nine located within Native Community Management Areas and one within a designated Recreation Area.

Each management area describes a unique landscape or management focus that considers soils, topography, community type, and other factors which shape the management for each area. Each management area has specific short- and long-term objectives that articulate the future desired condition based on the ecological capabilities of the area and other factors. Because forests and landscapes change slowly, actions taken, or not taken, over the next 15 years may require 50-100 years to affect the forest as a whole. Short descriptions of the different types of management areas are below.

Forest Production

The general management objective for forest production management areas is the sustainable production of timber and other forest products. However, forest production areas also meet a wide range of ecological and recreation objectives. In these cases, management practices are modified to be compatible with and support these multiple objectives.

Forest Production Management Areas.....	46,586 acres
Area 1: Perry Creek Basin.....	3,038 acres
Area 2: Morrison and Levis Creek Basin	29,350 acres
Area 3: Robinson Creek Basin	14,198 acres

Habitat Management

The management objective of habitat management areas is to provide or enhance habitat, whether upland, wetland or aquatic, to support specific species of plants or animals.

Habitat Management Areas.....	9,276 acres
Area 4: Jack Pine.....	4,277 acres
Area 5: Dike 17 Wildlife	4,999 acres

Native Community Management

The primary management objective for native community management areas is the representation, restoration and perpetuation of native plant and animal communities, whether upland, wetland or aquatic, and other aspects of native biological diversity. Management activities are designed to achieve land management objectives through natural processes whenever possible. Only those areas of highest value for protection or community restoration were selected.

Native Community Management Areas	9,979 acres
Area 6: Upper Black River*	1,909 acres
Area 7: Arbutus Oaks*	215 acres
Area 8: Castle Mound Pine Forest*	171 acres
Area 9: East Fork of the Black River*	1,083 acres
Area 10: Ketchum Creek Headwaters*	581 acres
Area 11: Paradise Valley Pines.....	669 acres
Area 12: Peatlands*	1,203 acres
Area 13: Catfish Eddy Terraces*	745 acres
Area 14: Robinson/Millston Pines*	626 acres
Area 15: Settlement Road Pine Swamp.....	156 acres
Area 16: Stanton Pines	971 acres
Area 17: Starlight Wetlands*	1,650 acres

Recreation Management

In recreation management areas, activities are focused on providing and maintaining land and water areas and facilities for outdoor public recreation or education.

Recreation Management Areas.....	2,396 acres
Area 18: Overmeyer Hills*	2,241 acres
Area 19: Campgrounds and Day Use	155 acres

* Includes a designated State Natural Area

State Natural Area Designations

Six new State Natural Areas have been identified on the Black River State Forest. Four existing State Natural Areas are

proposed to be expanded. There are a total of 10 State Natural Areas on the BRSF, totaling 4,892 acres in size.

State Natural Areas are part of a statewide system of sites identified for the purposes of ecological research, education, and to assure the full range of ecological diversity for future generations. State Natural Areas are unique because they can serve as stand alone properties or they can be designated on other properties such as state forests. On the state forest, State Natural Areas are not separate management areas, and the SNA designation does not change the underlying management objectives, prescriptions, or authorized management activities outlined in this master plan for each land management area.

Recreation

The plan maintains most of the existing recreational amenities and opportunities. Changes are designed to meet the demands of today's forest visitor and to improve the quality of the state forest's offerings. Increasing the number of electrical sites at modern campgrounds and enhancing the motorized trail system to address environmental concerns and increased use represent the most significant actions addressed in the plan.

Changes at camping facilities focus on improving amenities at the modern campground, such as increasing the number of electric campsites, installing a new shower and restroom facility, and constructing a new office building, to address changing preferences and demands for services by today's



recreational user. The state forest will continue to offer a variety of designated trails for hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, and horseback riding. The property will continue to provide hunting and fishing opportunities.

There will be changes made to the motorized trail system, including trail upgrades, re-routes, new trail connectors, and closures. Changes focus on improving trail tread, improving wetland crossings, reducing erosion and rutting, and protecting water quality, while improving rider experience and safety. The trail width in some locations will be narrowed where it has expanded from its original size due to heavy use in recent years. Restoration of vegetation in these areas will create a more natural appearance along the trail. Changes also focus on reducing user conflicts while maintaining or improving connectivity to the regional trail network.

A new trail connector to the Jackson County ATV trail system will be pursued in the Millston area. To fully implement this new connection, a variety of landowners will need to authorize ATV use on their respective ownerships. At the time when the

new trail connection is authorized and opened for ATV use, 7.9 miles of the existing Wildcat Trail will be closed to ATV use (2.5 miles will be retained as a designated snowmobile trail). In the interim, the Wildcat Trail will remain open to maintain a short loop experience in the area.

Boundary Expansion

The master plan calls for an expansion to the project boundary for the Black River State Forest. Seven areas were selected because of their ability to sustain additional ecological, economic, and social value for the property and region. The expansion areas surround the existing boundary and total approximately 19,800 acres. If the boundary expansion were acquired in its entirety, the property would encompass approximately 88,000 acres, excluding water.

The Environmental Analysis

The Environmental Analysis (EA) analyzes the potential impacts of actions recommended in the master plan, ranging from land acquisition and facility development to forest management and operation. The EA for this plan concludes that the imple-



mentation of the master plan provides positive recreational, ecological, social, and economic benefits to the region with minimal adverse impacts.

The Public Involvement Process

Public involvement has been crucial to the development of this plan. A variety of tools were used to give information on the planning process and solicit public input, including news releases, mailings, surveys, annual reports, and a website. In addition, public open house meetings were held at various stages throughout the planning process. Public comment showed support for the recreational opportunities provided by the forest including camping, various trail opportunities, and hunting. Generally public comments supported state purchase of lands around the Black River State Forest, a move that would keep more of the area in the public domain open to a variety of recreation uses and protected from increasing development pressure. Motorized recreation issues received the most comments.

HOW THE STATUTORY AND OTHER PURPOSES AND BENEFITS OF THE STATE FOREST WILL BE REALIZED THROUGH THE DRAFT PLAN

Purpose of State Forests

State forests are defined by Wisconsin Statutes 28. The purposes and benefits of state forests are outlined in the following language of 28.04 (2):

- (a) The Department shall manage the state forests to benefit the present and future generations of residents of this state, recognizing that the state forests contribute to local and statewide economies and to a healthy natural environment. The Department shall assure the practice of sustainable forestry and use it to assure that state forests can provide a full range of benefits for present and future generations. The Department shall also assure that the management of state forests is consistent with the ecological capability of the state forest land and with the long-term maintenance of sustainable forest communities and ecosystems. These benefits include soil protection, public hunting, protection of water quality, production of recurring forest products, outdoor recreation, native biological diversity, aquatic and terrestrial wildlife, and aesthetics. The range of benefits provided by the Department in each state forest shall reflect its unique character and position in the regional landscape.
- (b) In managing the state forests, the Department shall recognize that not all benefits under par. (a) can or should be provided in every area of a state forest.

- (c) In managing the state forests, the Department shall recognize that management may consist of both active and passive techniques.

Local and Statewide Economies

Under the plan, the forest would increase its contribution to the state and local economies through forest products and tourism. Annual harvest levels will increase slightly in the next years based on current inventory data. Providing a wide range of diverse recreational opportunities and settings, maintaining scenic forest resources, and providing wildlife and fisheries habitat will ensure the forest's role as a destination in the region.

A Healthy Natural Environment and the Long-Term Maintenance of Sustainable Forest Communities and Ecosystems

Due to the size of the Black River State Forest and its varied resources, all of the prescribed benefits of a state forest may be realized on the property. By managing for these benefits, the goals of achieving a healthy natural environment and the long-term maintenance of sustainable forest communities and ecosystems would be realized.



INTRODUCTION AND PLAN OVERVIEW

Full Range of Benefits

Protection of Soil and Water Quality

Soil and water quality will continue to be protected. Erosion control practices, such as Best Management Practices (BMPs) for water quality, will be followed when conducting forest management and other management activities. Expansion of the forest boundary could provide opportunities to expand protection to new areas and waters.

Production of Recurring Forest Products

Under the proposed plan, 92% of the property's forested acres (52,500 acres) will be under active sustainable forest management to produce forest products.

Outdoor Recreation

The plan proposes to maintain most existing recreational opportunities. The number of campsites with electricity will be increased at the modern campground. Rustic camping in other areas of the property may be reduced due to decreasing user demand for this type of camping.

A variety of recreation trail opportunities will continue to be offered on the Black River State Forest for hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and ATV riding.

Access to the Black River and flowages, and water-based recreational opportunities will be maintained and in some cases, enhanced.

Hunting and fishing opportunities will remain abundant.

Native Biological Diversity

Native biological diversity will be maintained through enhanced forest structure and species composition in some areas. Wetlands and other unique habitats will be protected. Endangered and threatened species will continue to be protected.

Aquatic Habitats and Wildlife

The Black River and flowages, wetlands, and riparian habitats will receive a high level of protection. All wetlands and riparian areas will be managed to promote healthy ecosystems and aesthetic enjoyment. BMPs for water quality will be followed and shorelines will remain undeveloped.

Terrestrial Wildlife

The forest and wildlife management prescriptions have been developed to ensure that habitat and ecosystems for a wide range of terrestrial and aquatic wildlife will be sustained and improved.

Aesthetics

Over time, scenic qualities of the forest will be enhanced as longer-lived species such as white pine become more common through forest management. The scenic quality of all shorelines and primary roadways will be maintained or enhanced through the application of aesthetic management techniques.

This is your plan. The Black River State Forest Master Plan addresses the desires of Wisconsin's citizens who want their forest resources sustained for future generations. At the same time, they expect a full range of environmental, social, and ecological benefits today and in the future. This plan attempts to achieve that balance in a scientifically credible and sustainable way. It was developed with countless hours of public input and several rigorous scientific and technical reviews. Many hands were involved in shaping it.

This is a visionary plan. The Black River State Forest Master Plan captures an idealized view of the state forest's long-term future. This points general direction for short-term actions. The diversity of the forest structure is enhanced over time, providing for a broad range of social and ecological values important to Wisconsin citizens, including recreation. Diverse forest communities contribute to the range of wildlife habitats necessary for all native species, and contribute to broad biodiversity.

This is a focused plan. The plan calls for active and passive management across the landscape and over time to achieve its goals and objectives. It relies on integrated and adaptive management of the forest resources and focuses on the compatibility of forest uses over time.

This is a flexible and adaptive plan. The plan calls for adaptive management and monitoring the response of the forest to strategies outlined in the plan. The responses are evaluated against the objectives. The plan calls for continuous monitoring and regular public reviews and a major review approximately every 15 years.

This is a sustainable plan. A sustainable forest requires flexibility and adaptability. This plan will assure sustainable forest products, continued recreation opportunities as well as a sustainable ecosystem and healthy watersheds.

